



# STATE OF IDAHO

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **CANYON COUNTY HORSE TESTS POSITIVE** **FOR WEST NILE VIRUS**

(BOISE) A horse in Canyon County has tested positive for the West Nile virus, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and Idaho Department of Health and Welfare announced jointly today.

West Nile virus was discovered in 11 of Idaho's 44 counties in 2004, infecting three people along with numerous horses and birds.

Since the introduction of equine vaccines, the number of horses reported with West Nile infections has decreased dramatically nationwide, from 15,000 horses in 2002 to 1,341 last year. Last year, there were 22 cases of horses infected with the West Nile virus in Idaho.

"It appears that the horse vaccine, when administered properly, does make a difference. Our advice to horse owners is to make sure that their horses are protected, and if not, they should contact their veterinarian immediately," said Dr. Marilyn Simunich, a veterinarian for the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

The most common sign of West Nile Virus in horses is weakness, usually in the hindquarters. Weakness may be indicated by a widened stance, stumbling, leaning to one side and toe dragging. In extreme cases, paralysis may follow. Fever is sometimes evident, as are depression and fearfulness. Lip smacking, chewing movements and fine muscle tremors may be noticed.

Humans cannot contract West Nile through contact with an infected horse.

The case serves as a reminder of the importance to vaccinate horses against the virus and for people to take appropriate steps to protect themselves against mosquito bites.

West Nile virus is an infection spread by mosquitoes. The virus was first discovered in 1999 in the New York City area. Since then, the virus has spread westward and can be found throughout the country. People and animals are generally infected through the

bite of a mosquito.

"Most people infected with West Nile virus will not realize they have contracted the virus or will only have a mild flu-like illness," says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, "But the virus can lead to serious illness." She says people of any age can contract the virus, but the illness can be more serious for people over the age of 50. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever.

To protect themselves, people are advised to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;

- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's Web site at <http://www.state.id.us/dhw>.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps you can take to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. Information is available on ISDA's Web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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